

# “Cultural Marxism”: The Quixotic Catch-All Term to Cover Feminism, Multiculturalism, Identity Politics, Civil Rights, ...

By [Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin](#)

Global Research, December 21, 2018

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

*“The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.” — H. L. Mencken*

Cultural Marxism is a strange catch-all term being thrown around a lot these days. Why is it strange? Because if you scratch below its surface all that seems logical melts into air.

The term ‘cultural Marxism’ is used to cover feminism, multiculturalism, identity politics, civil rights, postmodernism and globalism. It has also been used recently to describe multiculturalist curricula in the education system.

Let’s take a look at these concepts in a little more detail:

## Feminism

Marxist ideas about women covered ideas of equality and examined the historical and contemporary position and exploitation of women. Marx and Engels wrote about death from overwork, cheap labour, women and children in the mills, etc. They appear to have had a low opinion of feminism. In a letter from Engels to Paul Ernst, Engels [writes](#):

“Furthermore, I am not at all acquainted with what you call the feminist movement in Scandinavia; I only know some of Ibsen’s dramas and have not the slightest idea whether or to what extent Ibsen can be considered responsible for the more or less hysterical effusions of bourgeois and petty bourgeois women careerists.”

Therefore, the inclusion of feminism into the meaning of cultural Marxism is odd.

## Multiculturalism

Marxist ideas are based on the idea of citizenship and the state, that all citizens should be treated equally under the law with the common identity of “citizen”. However, it seems that the deeper the political and financial crises of the state and the subsequent whittling down of the rights of the citizen, the more emphasis is put on multicultural policies, as if to provoke the majority population into negative reactions. Marxist ideology was reflected in Article Two of the constitution of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic of 1918 whereby [citizenship](#) was held:

“(22) The Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, recognizing the equal rights of all citizens, irrespective of their racial or national connections, proclaims all privileges on this ground, as well as oppression of national minorities, to be contrary to the fundamental laws of the Republic.”

One description of multiculturalism in Western countries, notes that [multiculturalism](#) “was seen to combat racism, to protect minority communities of all types, and to undo policies that had prevented minorities from having full access to the opportunities for freedom and equality promised by the liberalism that has been the hallmark of Western societies since the Age of Enlightenment.”

If it was necessary for minority groups to fight for rights, “to protect minority communities”, “to undo policies that had prevented minorities from having full access” to opportunities then it seems that this too also has very little to do with Marxist ideology. Being involved in the struggle for basic rights does not necessarily mean you are a Marxist.

### Identity politics and civil rights

The same can be said for identity politics whereby people of a particular religion or race form exclusive political alliances and move away from traditional broad-based party politics. It is true that minority cultural groups have experienced exclusion in the past and today, and fight for their rights but Marxist ideas focus on the concept of class, not race, religion or ethnic group. Marxist politics is formulated on the basis of class struggle not the political objectives of individuals or minority groups.

### Postmodernism

Strangest of all is the inclusion of postmodernism in descriptions of Cultural Marxism. Postmodernism is a movement characterised by an attitude of rejection of metanarratives such as Marxism. A metanarrative (or grand narrative) is a theory that tries to give a totalizing, comprehensive account of history, culture etc based upon the appeal to universal truth. Postmodernism calls into question various assumptions of Enlightenment rationality, the idea of man free from Church-run society. Yet such Enlightenment ideas form the basis of Marxist philosophy and socialist ideology.

### Globalism

Globalism is a word associated with world-systems or other global trends. The [term](#) is associated with “post-war debates of the 1940s in the United States. In their position of unprecedented power, US planners formulated policies to shape the kind of postwar world they wanted, which, in economic terms, meant a globe-spanning capitalist order centered exclusively upon the United States.” Again, not very Marxist concepts, cultural or otherwise. You are more likely to find Marxist ideas in anti-globalisation movements.

It can be seen from all of the above that the basic ideas associated with cultural Marxism have more in common with crises of neo-liberalism and international capitalism than with Marxism. It may be true that the origins of ‘cultural Marxism’ lie in the Frankfurt school of the 1930s in the attempts of critics like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin to mix Marxist ideas with Freud to break down the effects of the church and state on revolutionary consciousness but it seems that later anything not

associated with the conservative values of the nationalist “white” Christian became ascribed to cultural Marxism.

## Monolithism

While the neo-nationalist right ascribes many different ideas and movements to cultural Marxism it can be shown that in the main they all actually benefit the political right. This is through monolithism (something having a uniform or inflexible quality or character), an approach that can be used as a sleight of hand to implement other agendas. Below are three different ways monolithism can be used to stifle dissent.

It is in the education system that we can begin to see monolithism being used to appear progressive and concerned with minority issues (multiculturalism) while at the same time implementing a right wing agenda. For example, recent changes in the French education system have been [criticised](#) for devoting more time to a 14th century Malian king, Mansa Kankan Mussa, (who was also a great scholar, an economist as well as an art lover!) compared to the study of Napoleon or even replacing French revolution lessons. By treating French history as monolithic (i.e. for the political right the threatening (revolutionary) and non-threatening elements can be treated as one), the baby can be thrown out with the bathwater, and the revolutionary tradition of the French people can be safely removed from the education system. Therefore the progressive parts of French history can be removed while appearing to be concerned about minority history. The added bonus is that non-threatening ethnic historical figures can be chosen too. (A more [subtle](#) approach than in Ireland where the study of History is being made *optional* at junior cycle in the secondary schools)

The second way dissent can be silenced using monolithism is to portray minority groups as being made up of similar people all sharing similar views. As Kenan Malik [writes](#):

“Multiculturalists tend to treat minority communities as if each was a distinct, singular, homogenous, authentic whole, each composed of people all speaking with a single voice, each defined primarily by a singular view of culture and faith. In so doing, they all too often ignore conflicts within those communities. All the dissent and diversity gets washed out. As a result, the most progressive voices often gets silenced as not being truly of that community or truly authentic, while the most conservative voices get celebrated as community leaders, the authentic voices of minority groups.”

The ‘authentic’ conservative gets privileged over the dissenting critic, once again serving the political right.

A third way monolithism works is in the change from the Marxist idea of class struggle (the proletariat vs the bourgeoisie) to categories of the oppressed vs the oppressor (a postmodern non-class concept). Yet again, we see a non-Marxist idea being ascribed to cultural Marxism. The oppressor is changed from the bourgeoisie to all privileged people. So for example, white people become the ‘oppressor’ and black people become the ‘oppressed’, the privileged vs the underprivileged, despite the fact that white people can have very varied economic backgrounds from very poor to ultra-rich. This way of grouping people (colour, creed, ethnicity) creates identities which are not class-based and therefore, from the perspective of the political right, also non-threatening.

## Moving targets

It is ironic that what the main targets described by the term cultural Marxism all have in common is the removal of the class (or individual) dissenting elements, or simply have no connection with Marxist ideology at all. The overriding concern, then, is that politics will be reduced to competing groups realigned along specific cultural boundaries, all blind to clever elite manipulation. Firing the term cultural Marxism at any divergent social, cultural or political activity will not enlighten people about what is really happening under their noses but will send them off tilting at windmills instead.

\*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

*Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin is an Irish artist, lecturer and writer. His [artwork](#) consists of paintings based on contemporary geopolitical themes as well as Irish history and cityscapes of Dublin. His blog of critical writing based on cinema, art and politics along with research on a database of Realist and Social Realist art from around the world can be viewed country by country [here](#). He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization.*

The original source of this article is Global Research  
Copyright © [Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin](#), Global Research, 2018

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)  
[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)